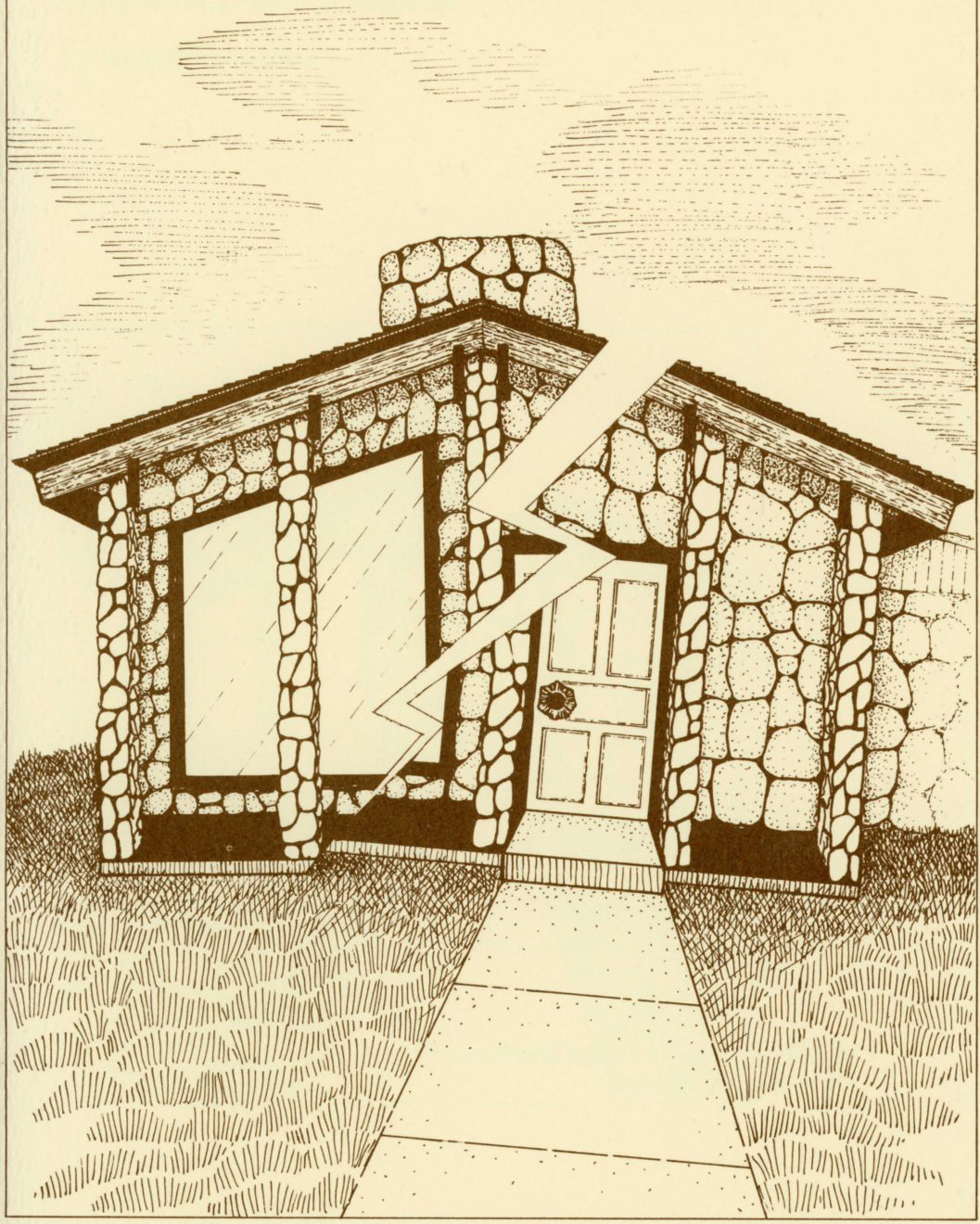
FAMILY VIOLENCE:
THE WELL-KEPT SECRET



Hogg Foundation for Mental Health
The University of Texas

FAMILY VIOLENCE: THE WELL-KEPT SECRET

by Melinda Longtain

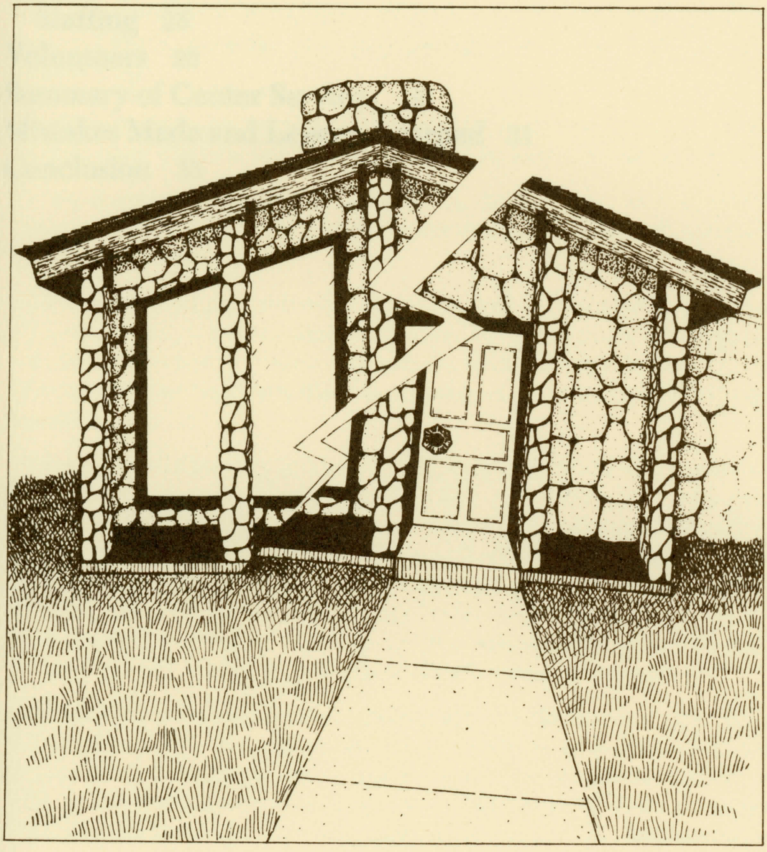


TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"Marriage for a woman is like jumping into a river in the winter; once she's done it, she remembers it all her life." That statement, made by Maxim Gorki in *The Lower Depths,* gave the once-popular view of women's lot in the marriage relationship.

Much has changed over the years. Marriage is no longer considered a master/slave pattern, with the husband as possessor of the wife.

Yet much remains the same. Wife battering still exists. So does husband battering (only men are less likely to admit to such treatment). Child abuse has become a large factor in our society.

Violence growing out of frustration or feelings of inadequacy or anger exists in all social strata. It is often unreported. Yet, in recent years, the plight of women who have been battered has come to light. And factors which used to remain the province of the bedroom have now become the concern of various helping agencies.

Women's liberation has, to some extent, helped to bring about action on behalf of battered women. However, if sexism contributes to wife beating (as demonstrated by men who lack superiority in personal resources and so resort to violence), then such acts continue in many households whether or not women are "liberated" by the labor market. For the woman without job skills, the problem of being battered becomes more "set" in the marriage pattern, since she often feels trapped within the marriage and her responsibilities as wife and mother. She is fearful of acting against her husband, who is her support.

Still another factor mitigating against help for the woman after she has been battered has been the reluctance of law enforcement personnel to interfere in family battles. Such problems are known to be dangerous for the attending officer. In addition, the women who have been hurt often drop charges against their husbands shortly after they have signed papers for their arrest.

Attitudes of society frequently work against the women in cases of battering. In some states a woman cannot sue her husband for assault and battery; in others a woman has to be beaten more severely than other victims of assault and battery before she can press charges. One study in Washington, D.C. showed that of the 7500 wives who attempted to bring charges against their husbands, fewer than 200 achieved their objective.

Dr. Murray A. Straus, Professor of Sociology at the University of New Hampshire, prepared a paper for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reporting that approximately 1.8 million wives are beaten by their husbands—and Dr. Straus estimates that the incidence may be much higher than that. He reported that police records over a seven-month period in Chicago showed that domestic disturbances exceeded the total response for murder, rape, aggravated assault, and other serious crimes. Oakland, California police responded to more than 16,000 family disturbance calls in one six-month period.

The numbers of reported wife beatings in New York in 1973 were 14,671—three times the number of reported rapes. It is estimated that this figure reflects only 10 percent of the actual cases. Middle-and upper-income class women suffer from beatings also, although they report such assaults less frequently than do lower class women, according to Dr. Straus.

That action is necessary on behalf of the victims of such abuse is a stated fact. Recently research, conferences, and various organizations have focused on the problem of the abused woman. The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration of the Department of Justice funds programs which aid battered women. Women's groups have set up shelters to give such women a place to go and time to heal.

A coalition of interested women from the city of Austin, Texas, took the initiative to open a shelter for battered women. Their goals were to offer such women and their children temporary refuge, to supply emotional and physical support, and to provide the community with information and perspectives concerning the problem of woman-battering and household violence. The Hogg Foundation joined with Travis County in providing funds for such a shelter, with the Foundation's monies directed toward mental health services for the women.

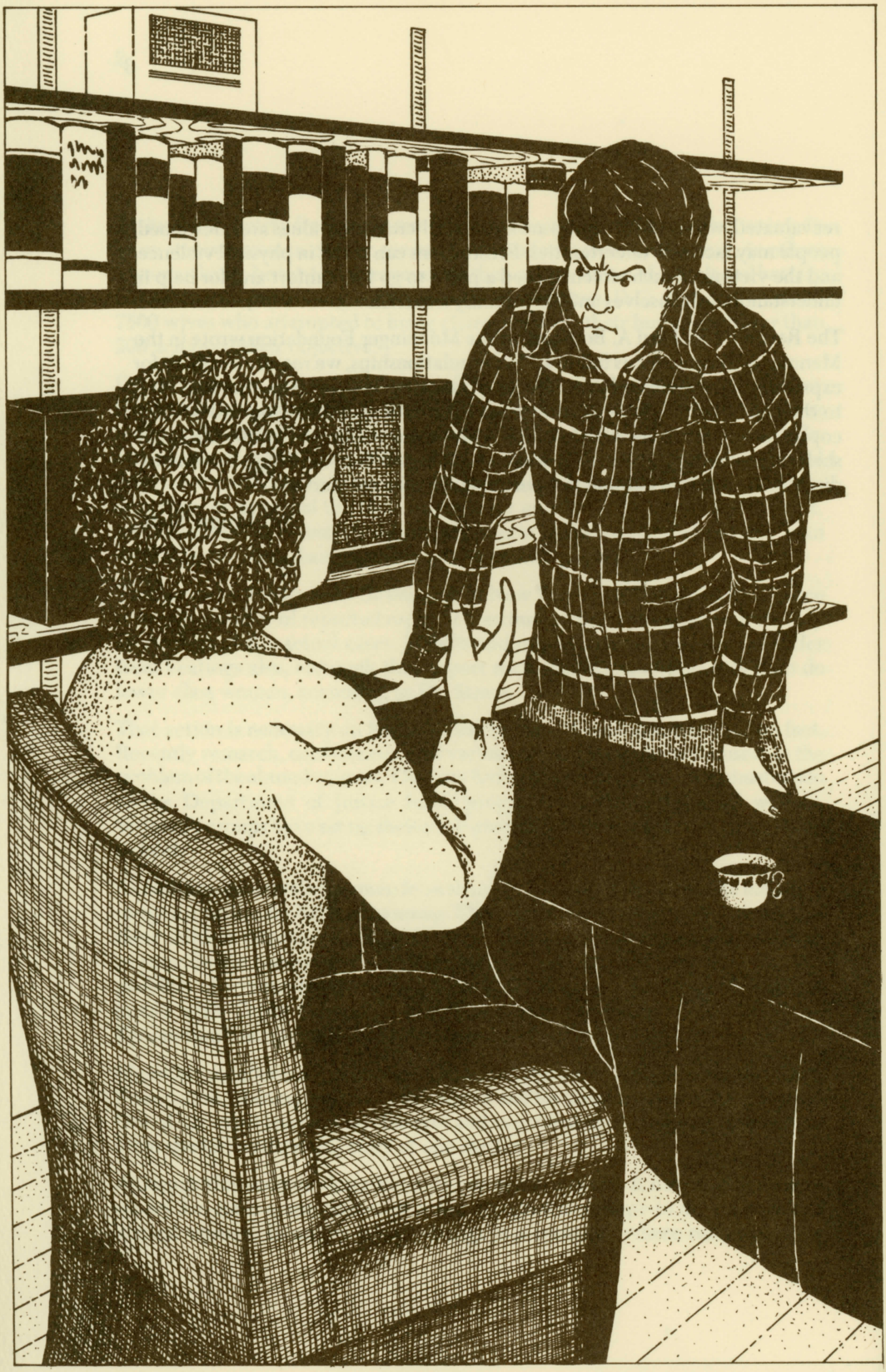
Melinda Longtain, a graduate student and Research Fellow with the Hogg Foundation, became especially interested and involved in the shelter program. Out of her experiences as an observer and as a member of the Hogg Foundation team she has written this story of one shelter.

Although this account describes only one pattern of aid, it may well serve as a model for other communities or other groups which hope to act on behalf of abused women. In an era where change is a constant, where roles are being

reevaluated, where old attitudes are shaken, where many values are questioned, people may face new uncertainties. Frustrations can result in physical violence, and the victims of such violence need a place to go for comfort and for help in understanding themselves and their family situation.

The Reverend Richard A. Bollinger of the Menninger Foundation wrote in the Menninger *Perspective* as follows, "In our relationships, we require channels for expressing aggression and love. We need consistent relationships that last." It is to the end of helping people strengthen their own understanding and develop coping mechanisms for relationships with others within the family that such shelters are being promoted. It was to such a goal that the Hogg Foundation directed its funds in helping this particular shelter get started.

Bert Kruger Smith



PREFACE: THE BEST KEPT SECRET EVER

Society has many secrets, and family violence is one of them. A family affair is a private affair. Tenaciously we as a society and culture have believed in the sacredness of this unit. The family, as a single, isolated and private entity, is undergoing some very powerful and pervasive changes. Because of the alterations, society must update its understanding of, and sensitivity to, what the family of today really is.

Such openmindedness would help to prevent the massive denial that we as a society enter into on occasions. For years we refused to believe that child abuse really existed; we ignored it, and families continued to live in fear and violence. From their abusive experiences, children learned that violence was a "legitimate" way to achieve goals, get power, and assert oneself.

This same massive denial presently exists in cases of spousal abuse. As a phenomenon, domestic violence is in the stages of documentation. Concerned professionals and lay persons are having to "prove" that such aggressiveness exists. Murray Straus, director of the Institute on Family Violence, calls it *selective inattention.*[1] He states that we have a socially shared definition of the family as non-violent. That characterization creates a "black-out," hiding the domestic turbulence that occurs daily in the lives of "normal" families. In one study, the author concluded that these "socially shared definitions of the family as non-violent seem to lead husbands and wives to define and construct instances in which physical force is used as something other than violence."[2]

Family violence does occur. The police department in Austin, Texas (population 331,000) received 3,684 calls for assistance in family disturbances in 1977. The city-county hospital of Austin estimates that one injury due to family violence is treated every other day. These figures are underestimates, at best. Women who find themselves in the emergency room at the county hospital are unlikely to admit being beaten by a husband or boyfriend.

Lower-income families are overrepresented in the figures on family disturbance calls received by the police. These data could lead to the erroneous conclusion that family violence is a problem exclusive of the middle class and the established rich.

Facts do not substantiate the data, however. Lower-income families generally have few resources. Their lack of options leads them to the social services in the community, like the emergency room of a public hospital. Professionals working with battered women agree that family violence is a problem involving all groups of people, regardless of race or income.

---

[1]Foreword by Murray Straus in Richard J. Gelles, *The Violent Home: A Study of Physical Aggression between Husbands and Wives.* Beverly Hills, California: Sage, 1974.

[2]Richard J. Gelles, *The Violent Home: A Study of Physical Aggression Between Husbands and Wives.* Beverly Hills, California: Sage, 1974.

It seems ironic that a bond between two people, originally conceived in love and optimism, could dissolve into a cycle of violence. But what other relationship commands so much intensity, leaves one so vulnerable and, perhaps, so desperate? Closeness breeds high emotion. For example, national figures demonstrate that relatives constitute the largest single category of homicides. In other words, people are more likely to kill someone they know and care about rather than a stranger.

It is common knowledge that police are reluctant to interfere with family feuds. The level of emotional intensity is so high that law enforcers run a great risk of becoming a police fatality in problems between a man and wife or a parent and child. All of this leans toward a debunking of the family myth; a man's home is not his castle, though there may be a reign of terror.

RELATIONSHIPS, WOMEN, AND SOCIETY

For many people, domestic violence is almost impossible to comprehend. Others believe that it exists and assume that a woman remains in such a relationship because she is "sick" and therefore beyond help.

Bruises and broken bones are visible signs of the anger and hostility that can manifest themselves in a relationship. We call this physical abuse and react with horror. Depression and alcoholism are less visible signs of the anger and hostility that can manifest themselves in a relationship. We call this emotional abuse and react with sympathy. The difference between physical abuse and emotional abuse may be minimal.

Professionals and lay persons have been obsessed and distracted by the battering that occurs in some dysfunctional relationships. The dysfunctional relationship is the problem; the battering is a symptom. The *problem*—poor relationships—is not uncommon. The tremendous increase in couples-counseling across the nation demonstrates that relationships, in general, are in trouble.

A woman who stays in a battering situation is a victim of herself, her husband, and society. The chains that keep her locked in this destructive setting are her own creation as well as her husband's. The couple involved lives in a cycle of anger and guilt, fear and doubt, dependency and fantasy. They have developed a seemingly irrational and dysfunctional pattern of interacting with one another. The "secret" they share serves to isolate them further from the rest of the world. This isolation insures perpetuation of a cycle of love and violence. Even if the woman felt strong enough to break away from this vicious cycle, what would await her?

Women with young children are particularly bound. Many of them have few marketable skills or have not been in the job market for several years. Opportunities available for untrained workers pay minimum wage, which is not enough to support a family.

In divorce cases where custody of the children is generally given to the mother, child support is more fiction than reality. It is estimated that only 40% of child support payments are actually made. With marginal access to a job market that is limited, it takes more than courage for a woman to leave her home. Many women report that at least they can be sure their children will be clothed and fed if they remain in the home.

Traditionally the woman in our society has been given the responsibility for child rearing. Society has often assigned her this role without making adequate provisions for the day care which would allow her to make enough money to support her family. The combination of inadequate preparation for the job market and the lack of child care facilities plus possibilities of occupational discrimination all subtly confine a woman in the marriage, even though she may be a victim of violence and abuse.

CREATING A SHELTER

Concern of women about women is a growing phenomenon. Across the nation groups of women gather to talk informally. They share their anger and depression and their hopes and dreams. They give support and guidance to each other, learning from one another's experiences. Women talk and discover they can have an identity independent of a man; being in a relationship is important and rewarding, but not at the cost of personal identity.

In Austin, Texas, several women found that they were mutually concerned about intrafamilial violence, especially violence against women. They were also surprised to find that each of them had experienced a violent relationship or been close to one, through a friend. This fact alarmed them. The incidence rate in their group seemed too high to be a coincidence.

Not satisfied simply to vent their anger and fear, these women turned emotion into action. They knew that battered women need a place to go, and finding such a place became their primary objective. But taking an idea from the kitchen table to the drawing board and developing a realistic plan of action is difficult. The following is a brief narrative on some of the issues and concerns that must be addressed by a grass roots organization, like the Austin Coalition on Battered Women.

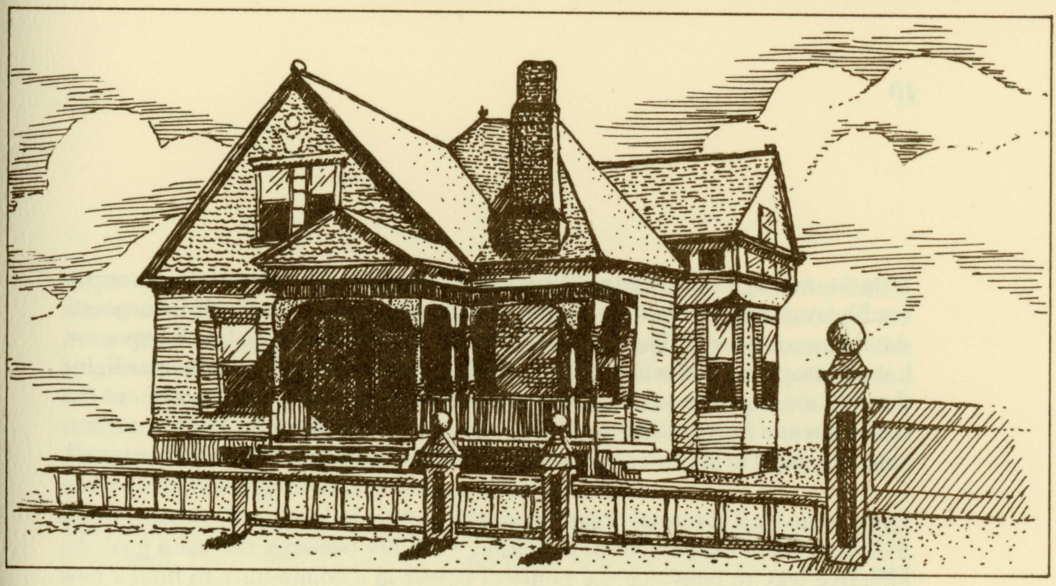
Soliciting money is usually necessary to support groundwork activity. Financial support cannot be solicited legally unless there is a recognized, i.e., incorporated, governing body receiving the monies. Thus, an important question that must be addressed early is whether or not a group should find a sponsoring agent within the community or if it should incorporate itself.

There are pros and cons to this question. In Austin several possible organizations might have been suitable sponsors, like the Rape Crisis Center, the Women's Center, or possibly the YWCA, a coalition of churches, the Junior League, and so on.

The advantage to finding a sponsor lies in the time saved in not having to file for incorporation with the State, a process that can become bogged down in red tape. Finding an organization with related interests and a favorable image in the community can bring quick recognition to a new idea. It can also bring credibility.

If the sponsoring agency is well-run, it can also provide leadership and direction. It can model appropriate organizational behavior and management skills that will be necessary if the final goal, i.e., creating a shelter, is realized.

An established agency has formal, as well as informal, access to other agencies and people important in a community. Acting on the behalf of a new group or



idea, a strong sponsoring agent provides an entry into the existing network of community agents and personnel relevant to the goal. Also, while the sponsoring agent is providing the "parent" role, the adopted group can be filing its own papers of incorporation with the future goal of managing its own affairs.

The advantages to being sponsored evaporate when the conditions are not just right. Both parties should move slowly, clearly communicating about the role each will assume if the alliance takes place. People and agencies operate with hidden agendas, which are not always conscious and less frequently discussed. Closely scrutinizing one another and being sure of motives, goals, philosophies, and expectations help to prevent later misunderstandings with a sponsoring agent.

Many questions need to be considered in choosing the right sponsor. How long has the organization been in the community? Is it well supported by the community? What is the present and projected funding? What is the political standing? Is the potential sponsor sincerely interested in the "cause," or is the cause something it would use to further its own needs and interests? Is the organization structurally sound, or is there dissension and low morale in the system? Does its conceptualization of the problem, i.e., family violence, complement the estranged group's conceptualization? Can the biases of both be identified, and are they consonant?

The group seeking support must understand all of the ramifications of giving up its autonomy to align formally with another group. Independence and power are not relinquished easily.

Finding a sponsor is like finding a business partner, or, more dramatically, a marriage partner. If it is to be a productive and prosperous relationship, each party must trust the other, communicate clearly and openly, and share common goals and values.

If the knowledge, skills, and political know-how are within the original group or readily available to members of that group, taking the time to self-incorporate should be considered. The Austin Center for Battered Women found a sponsor, but philosophical and technical issues led to a power struggle, thus jeopardizing the relationship over time. A lot of time and energy was used to sort out the confusion and hurt feelings resulting from the power struggle. The Center was able to complete its own incorporation before the matter completely erupted.

Once some kind of formal organizational structure is developed, either through incorporation or sponsorship, increasing visibility becomes the main goal. An effective way to convince the political power in a community to fund a new agency is by first convincing the general public.

The Austin Coalition on Battered Women recognized this goal and began to work on a one-day awareness workshop, sponsored by the Austin Women's Center and the Austin Commission on the Status of Women. The purpose of the conference was to share knowledge and information related to the etiology and characteristics of wife-abuse. The coalition began to research the problem nationally and locally, knowing it would have to convince the majority of people that family violence exists. Obtaining descriptive statistics is a clear, direct means of communicating with a nonbeliever.

A broad-based group of people crossing professional and lay boundaries was invited to the one-day workshop. Medical persons, legal experts, mental health professionals and representatives of criminal justice efforts attended the conference. An estimated 150-200 people came, one-third of that group being battered women seeking alternatives.

A list of goals was generated by the group participating in the conference. Creating a shelter facility in Austin, Texas, was the main objective. Other goals included changing the attitudes and behavior of law enforcers and medical professionals coming in contact with battered women. With this mandate, the coalition began work on a grant proposal and familiarized itself with city and county funding structures.

The Travis County Department of Human Services provided seed money that was matched by monies from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. Other support was received from Austin/Travis County Mental Health Mental Retardation services for professional counseling and community outreach. Finally, the Austin City Council and Planning Commission provided the physical facility by leasing to the coalition a large residential building for one dollar a year.

An unexpected source of resistance emerged when the City Council publicly announced its plans to lease the chosen property. The neighborhood of the prospective site responded by circulating a petition opposing the decision. The neighborhood association was a well-organized group, and it seemed to pose a serious threat. The local residents feared the worst. They were convinced that violence and vandalism would spread into their area if the Center were close by. They had visions of drunken husbands searching the neighborhood for their mates, jeopardizing the safety of homes and families.

The relationship between the City Council and the coalition had been carefully developed. The coalition knew the importance of communicating honestly and frequently with city officials. This interchange established the trust and support necessary to give the Center a chance to prove itself. In fact, none of the suspicions of the opposing group materialized, and the neighborhood is now openly supportive of the Center.

Beneath the economic and political issues involved in creating the shelter, there is nothing but hard work. But all that hard work and politicking had distracted the coalition from considering operational details. Its efforts were so successful that grant monies were approved several months sooner than expected. And that left little time for careful planning about actual implementation. Job descriptions were incomplete, the organizational structure was unclear, and members of the Board of Directors were not sure what role they were to play. The Director and most of the staff were hired after the Center opened.

The Center has been operating since July, 1977. The specifics of daily operations evolved as the young organization experienced some growing pains. Credibility in the community continues to grow; the city and county renewed their funding with few considerations.

BATTERED WOMEN–YOU MAY KNOW ONE

In the "respectable" part of town at a restaurant where the clientele is considered affluent, a group gathers daily to relax over a cocktail and possibly have dinner. The bartender there, as in other lounges, is in the unusual position of meeting a lot of people and becoming their instant confidante. At this particular dinnerhouse, the bartender, Mary, had become increasingly concerned about the growing depression of a woman who came in once or twice a week and sat at the bar. Having told Mary that her family problems couldn't get any worse, the woman came in and proved that they had. Opening her sweater, she showed Mary the bruises covering her arms. Her husband, a policeman, had beaten her the night before. Who said spousal abuse doesn't happen in the "nice" part of town?

In the same end of town a teacher from a well-to-do background surprised her colleagues by resigning in the middle of the school year. Her husband, also a schoolteacher, had beaten her on several occasions. Her final beating had left her with bruises she could no longer casually and jokingly explain away to her students and the other teachers. Several of her colleagues immediately remembered her talking about how easily she bruised and the excuses given when she came to school with marks on her arms. Everyone was surprised and responded with silence. Polite silence.

Both of these incidents are real. The teacher left her husband and returned to her parents' home where she could have the time and psychological space to plan a new beginning. The woman in the bar is still a victim. Where will her story end?

Both women were battered, but their ability to cope with the dilemma was different. The teacher was able to fall back on a very important resource, her parents and family. She was ready to ask for help, while the policeman's wife was not. For people without a natural support system, like parents or close friends, there is a need for a substitute network. A shelter like the Center for Battered Women in Austin, Texas meets such a need.

Polly is another battered woman. She and her seven-week-old son, Monty, were one of the first families to visit the Center for Battered Women. Polly was a college graduate and had taught school for several years. Her father was a dentist. There was no history of violence in her family. Polly was very easy-going; she had a determined, even temper and was best described as a middle-class flower child.

Her lover, the father of her son, had regularly beaten her. She had suffered fractured ribs and bruised arms from the beatings. Blind determination to "preserve the family" led her back to her mate time and time again. Polly's senses were shocked into reality when Monty was kidnapped by his father. Criminal charges were filed, and the battle over visiting privileges is still occurring. It took

six months and several return trips to the Center for Polly to make a definitive move towards changing her life.

Another early resident at the Center, Marty, was not so lucky. Marty came to the Center with a long history of abuse. The sordid details of her life challenge the imagination and threaten our need to deny how cruel life is for some people. She looked twenty years beyond her forty-five years of age and had been involved in several violent relationships.

One of her husbands prostituted her and beat her in front of others for money. She suffered many serious physical ailments from the beatings. Marty came to the Center during an involvement with a man who had been a suspect in the deaths of his two previous wives.

But Marty also returned to her mate. He promised to buy a suit and even attended church with her one Sunday. He swore off alcohol, and with each promise Marty's fantasies about love and relationships teased her further away from the reality of her last concussion. Human needs for affiliation are so strong that many, like Marty, will sacrifice pride and self-respect to live out this need to be intimately connected to another human being—even if it is an illusion.

Not all women return to their husbands or lovers. Kathy is the youngest client to have been served by the Center, and she is one of the most resourceful. She came to the Center when she was sixteen years old, several months after she had been married. Her husband, fearing he would lose her, controlled her every movement. He insisted that she be with him at all times. When this was impossible, he arranged for a friend to come over to their house and watch her. Her "bodyguard" was late one afternoon, and—not stopping to consider anything—she left without a car, extra clothing, or money. She stayed at the Center four days, long enough to arrange for transportation out of the city and for several job possibilities where she was going.

THE CENTER FOR BATTERED WOMEN, AUSTIN, TEXAS

The Austin Center for Battered Women is in one of the many older homes owned by the city. In its younger days, this old home was probably quite stately, with a sweeping front lawn, an inviting front porch and a feeling of open space. Today it is tired looking. The lawn is not as closely manicured, and the age-old wallpaper no longer stands out as it must have once upon a time. The windows creak as they move in their sockets.

In more ways than one, the Center for Battered Women is unusual. A variety of sounds and textures form a human collage, different from those in other social service agencies. Usually a typewriter clanks in the background, phones ring, doors open and close, children yell, a mother scolds, a planning session goes on with the staff, a quick case conference takes place in the corner, fans hum, and possibly a firetruck or ambulance may be heard screaming past the Center.

Few organizations exist in such intimacy, where the client and service-providing staff literally and figuratively live together. The advantages and disadvantages of such an arrangement are experienced daily; the stresses are felt by both the client group and the professional group.

Closeness of this kind is demanding. Emotions tend to intensify, and in a setting where privacy is a rare event, frustrations can run rampant. It takes a dedicated professional to thrive in this environment and a determined and self-willed client to move into it and then beyond it.

The Center for Battered Women offers four general kinds of services: Emergency Housing, Counseling, Referrals and Advocacy, and Public Information. Contact with Center services is made through the twenty-four hour hotline staffed largely by volunteers. Eligibility for staying at the Center is based on the existence of a serious threat or the presence of actual violence in the home.

Eligible women may be transported from their homes to the Center by the police, if necessary, or volunteers or staff may meet the prospective resident at a public place. The address of the Center is not public information, and every effort is made to maintain this secrecy.

A new resident has access to immediate medical attention and orientation to the Center. She is given an information sheet listing the house policies and is asked to sign an agreement of compliance. Crisis counseling is available. Counselors act as a sounding board for the woman as well as providing an opportunity for the counselor's unobtrusive evaluation of the emotional state of the client and her children. As physical and emotional situations stabilize, the counselor and client can explore Center services.

Individual counseling provided by staff and trained volunteers is based on each woman's need and request for assistance. Agreements between the woman and the counselor create a service plan outlining goals to be worked on while the client stays at the Center. Weekly groups for resident and non-resident women focus on the development of specific skills and information sharing. Child-management, Al-Anon, and problem-solving support groups are designed to facilitate personal growth.

Women are encouraged to stay no longer than one month, with the average length of stay being considerably shorter than that. For those women choosing to move into independent living, shelter is often needed for a month or more while the woman makes all the necessary arrangements for relocating. More than one-third of the clients using the shelter services return to their homes. Many of these women do so with little more than a brief truce.

Emergency Housing: A Description of the Facility

Legally the Center can house up to fourteen women and children at any one time. There are three self-sustaining living units, one of which is largely administrative. A playroom is set aside for the children. One room is used by the counselor. Laundry facilities are also on the premises. A fenced yard area provides a place for the children to play where they can be supervised easily by a mother or a volunteer. The many shade trees help to beat the summer heat, both outside and inside where the fans hum constantly five months a year.

The furnishings are "potluck." Chairs don't match, couches don't "spring," and bulletin boards with newspaper clippings serve as wallhangings. The bedrooms are a mixed assortment of bunk beds, single beds, an occasional double bed, varying sizes and shapes of bureaus, and a multi-colored ensemble of sheets, bedspreads, and curtains.

Only Goodwill could furnish a home so creatively. And that is exactly the case. Goodwill and private donations are the sole providers for the office equipment, living accommodations, and housewares. From the administrator's desk to the pots and pans in the three living units, the generosity and cooperation of others has helped to make the Center for Battered Women a happening, a success.

In its first year of operation, the furnishings went from sparse to "comfortable." One day there was a "new" refrigerator, or a new couch, or a colorful piece of carpeting. This is one of the many ways in which the Center for Battered Women has proved itself to be a part of the community—it has asked for, and received, help and support.

Referrals and Advocacy

Ultimately the greatest resource available to a social service agency is its ability to be supported by and connected with other social service providers in the community. This is particularly true for the Center for Battered Women. The needs of the women coming to the shelter are so numerous and unpredictable that a significant role the Center plays is connecting its clients with other agencies and services in the area. Fortunately, Austin is a progressive city, supporting a wide array of social services.

The types of referrals made at the Center can generally be categorized under food, clothing, shelter, transportation, income, day care, medical aid, and legal advice. For a mother wanting to establish independent living, all of the referrals could be important and necessary. A woman who has left her home with no more than what she could stuff in a paper bag needs to start from scratch. This process can be long and tiring as she goes from one agency to another, asking for help and filling out forms.

The individual circumstances of the clients can be very different, yet starkly similar. In an unusual case, a woman transported herself to the Center in the family Winnebago and unboarded with matching luggage filled with expensive clothing. Despite outward appearances, she was pitifully destitute as are the majority of women coming to the Center. Her husband had closed out all of her credit sources and bank accounts, leaving her essentially penniless.

Women with children can usually apply for Aid for Dependent Children and receive some financial relief. Meeting the criteria for AFDC, a woman is then eligible for Food Stamps and a medical card. Individual food stamps are turned over to the Center in a cooperative fashion during a woman's stay.

The Center has been flooded with clothing donations from the community, and it can usually outfit residents and their children. Some women are referred to Goodwill or to St. Vincent dePaul. Recently Center personnel discovered a church that uses its basement as a clothing store with just the right price—frëe.

Supposing a woman has come to the Center and gathered a wardrobe for herself and her children, filed for divorce, received food stamps and a medical card—what next? Much has been accomplished by the resident, but even more is left. Independent living requires that she have a job, day care for the children, and affordable housing. The Center for Battered Women struggles with these problems daily. Much energy is directed toward helping the residents find resources to meet these very basic needs, but the problem is big. There is a critical shortage of federally funded day care and housing.

Even when it appears that all the obstacles have been overcome for a woman to move on to independent living, a skeptic's point of view is prudent. A particularly descriptive case is a woman who had come to the Center with her baby and little else. With much hard work she was able to make all of the arrangements for moving out from the Center except for housing. Finally finding an affordable place to live, she hurriedly made her deposit with the landlord. She returned the next day to find that the landlord had rented it to someone else—someone without children. This problem is common for women with families.

The Center for Battered Women is always looking for a new resource for its clients. From the case descriptions it is apparent that the women staying at the Center have many needs that vary unpredictably. The Center realizes how much it depends on other agencies for many of its services and the critical contribution that support systems make to the overall program.

In this manner, the Center for Battered Women models the creation of a service designed for a specific need which is often ignored or overlooked by other agencies. Emphasizing other resources and referrals available in the community has certainly strengthened the total program at the Center. This cooperative approach is better for clients and the community. In a time when money is tight, funding agencies look more favorably on projects which are careful not to duplicate a service already present in a community.

Legal Aid

An important referral for the Center for Battered Women is Legal Aid. Many women look to our legal system for protection and safety only to find that little can be done. Only token help can generally be given, as most attorneys and police officers will readily admit. Austin Legal Aid has been a steady resource for the Center for Battered Women, advising on legal matters and instructing staff persons on the complicated procedures accompanying legal interventions.

The most commonly used legal remedy is a peace bond which can be arranged through the court of the Justice of the Peace. A peace bond summons the

offender to appear in court where he is chastised by the judge and warned to "keep the peace" or pay a fine if another infraction occurs. To be in effect, the peace bond must be served. When the judge is unable to locate the offender, a constable is made responsible for serving the bond. Locating unemployed offenders can be difficult and time consuming, and it is a low priority item for constables.

If the bond is served, at best it provides psychological relief to a battered woman. Unless she is able to remove herself and her children to a separate residence, a peace bond will not restrict the comings and goings of her husband nor prevent him from destroying common property. Several Justices of the Peace in the Austin, Texas community expressed significant dissatisfaction with the futility of issuing a peace bond and confided they were discouraging the practice altogether.

A Temporary Restraining Order is a second legal intervention, providing injunctive relief of a sort. It is issued as part of another suit, typically a divorce suit. This order restricts the husband from the wife's premises, makes it illegal to destroy common property, and keeps the husband away from the children. An advantage to the Temporary Restraining Order is that an offender is immediately bound. A copy is given to the woman who can present it herself if the husband returns.

The Restraining Order remains active for ten days only. After that period an extended set of legal proceedings acts on the original spirit of the first filing. If the offender violates the guidelines of the Order, the victim files a notice of contempt of court which eventually leads to a court date. Legal proceedings enacted against the offender are cumbersome. They span a significant period of time, during which the woman still has no protection and the abuser has experienced little, if any, inconvenience for his actions. A Temporary Restraining Order is another token legal remedy available to battered women.

A final category of legal solutions to the problems of battered women involves criminal proceedings rather than civil. A charge of felony assault between strangers requires serious physical damage such as the loss of an organ, numerous broken bones, or a permanent disability. Felony assault between spouses is usually reduced to a misdemeanor assault, the most probable criminal charge in cases of domestic violence. Police must witness a misdemeanor in order to arrest without a warrant. Few wife-beatings, however, occur in public. Therefore, the charge is inappropriate and offers little hope to battered women. Too often police tell victims they cannot press charges against a spouse, or that the procedure can be done only during regular business hours. Both statements are false.

Although Legal Aid is a referral used frequently by the Center for Battered Women, it may well be one of the least effective resources. The interest and support of Legal Aid has been remarkable, but the confining nature of the legal system has not been sympathetic to battered women. Several of the residents have used Legal Aid in filing divorce petitions, a much less complicated and more direct intervention.

Counseling

The Center for Battered Women strives to provide an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance—an atmosphere that is challenging but not threatening. Counseling is not pushed on clients. An assumption is made that the clients best know what their needs are. Active involvement by the resident in self-initiated change increases the amount of control felt by the woman over her environment.

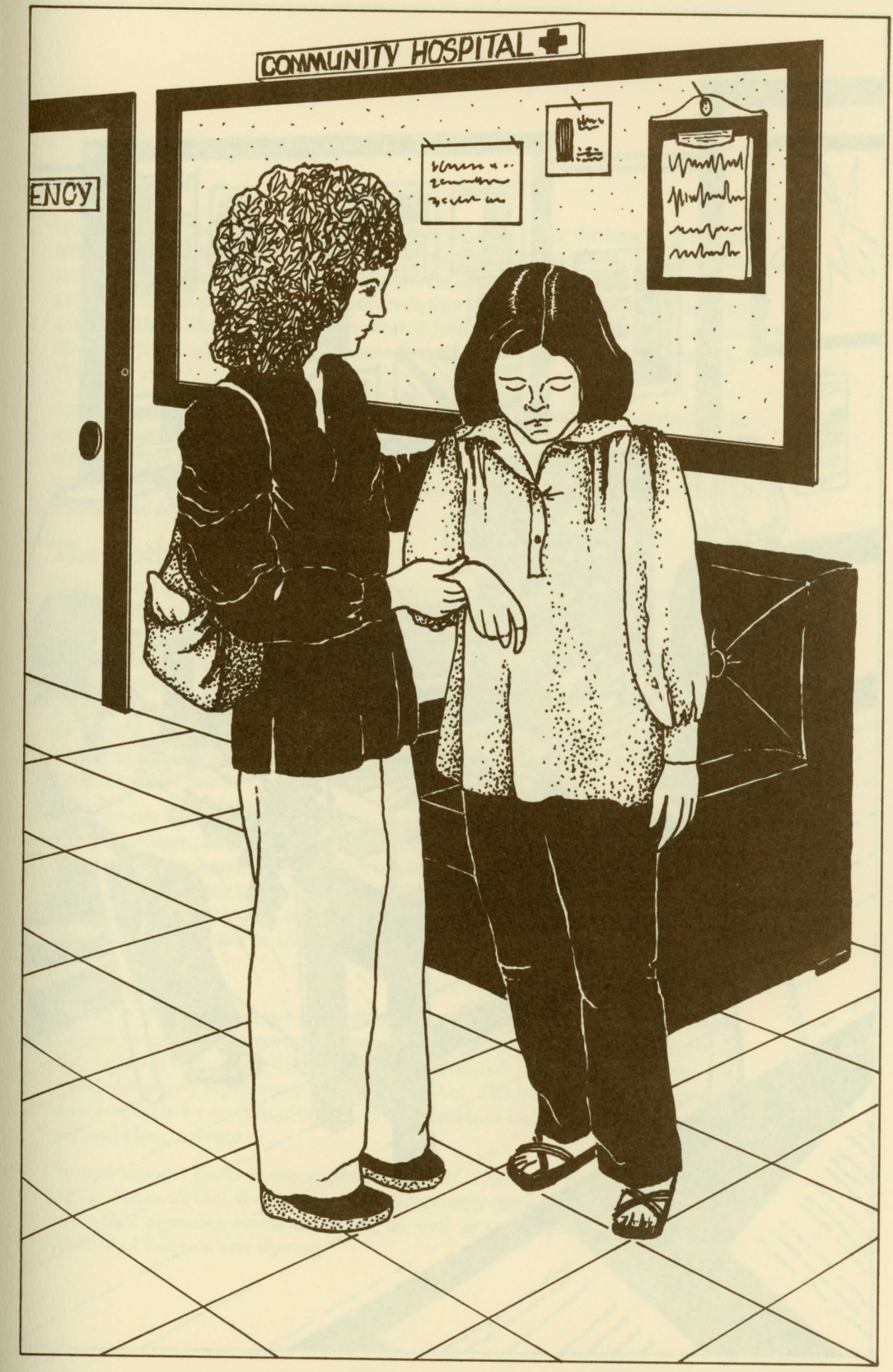
For a variety of reasons, problem-solving counseling is the most common therapeutic intervention. This interaction is highly focused, with the therapist's primary role that of helping the client to explore options and learn how to choose and to evaluate the repercussions of that choice. The counselor aids the client to clarify her feelings. They work together to develop a decision-making structure for present and future problem solving.

The staff is determined to remain free of biases during this process. They avoid leaving a woman feeling pressured while making a decision that has to be her own. Should a woman decide to return to her home where she is likely to be beaten again, the counselor has to accept that choice.

Many of the women who come to the Center are not interested in counseling as much as in relocating, getting a divorce, or making a new start. Support is an important provision of the resources and referrals network at the Center. For some residents it is almost as if counseling is a luxury item for which they have no time. Other women simply are not ready to be open or to self-examine.

Time is the biggest problem confronting the therapist and clients. Residents are busy caring for their children or the children of another woman, keeping appointments with Legal Aid and potential employers, or following up any other community referrals. Little time remains for scheduling regular appointments with the Center counselor. Aside from the shortage of real time available, psychological time is also scarce for the residents. Consequently, counseling often happens when the client and the counselor least expect it—passing in the hall, sitting down over coffee, or between loads of laundry.

The counselor is kept busy filling many roles. She is a public speaker, telephone counselor, client advocate, referral specialist, volunteer trainer, data collector, report writer, and program developer. Time interferes with the counselor in another way, also. A counselor at a crisis center like the shelter doesn't know how


COMMUNITY HOSPITAL
ENCY


REFERRAL
SOURCES

long any of the residents will be at the Center. Not knowing the length of contact with the resident increases the responsibility of the therapist, complicating interaction between client and therapist. A counselor is less likely to probe with a client who will probably participate on a short-term basis. This fear of opening a door without the opportunity to close it before a client leaves is a continual dilemma for a counselor in a transient setting like the Center for Battered Women.

Another counseling service provided at the Center is the hotline operated by the staff and volunteers. Although counseling skills are used, this interaction is very different from the direct contact between a therapist and client in the office. The hotline makes the Center accessible to anyone and provides data concerning the widespread nature of family violence.

The Hotline

In its second quarter of operation, the Center for Battered Women received 451 calls on its crisis line. Each call is entered into a cumulative log for data collection. Looking through the log, one is struck by the range of circumstances confronting a telephone counselor. The caller could be a minister seeking advice and referrals for a couple involved in violence. It might be a neighbor who suspects someone she knows is being beaten; sometimes the "neighbor" is really the victim. Or the caller could be a child who witnessed her mother beaten by her father, or a social worker from the county hospital wanting to know if there is room for one more.

Many victims call. Some are curious. Many are afraid to identify themselves as battered women, although their husbands may push them around. One woman called as her husband, who had beaten her that night, was breaking into the house. The volunteer on duty, using another telephone line, was able to call the police while maintaining contact with the women, reassuring her that her nightmare would soon be over.

Staffing

Staffing at the Center varies according to the funding cycle. Three permanent, paid positions exist: Director, Counselor, and Volunteer Coordinator. In the past, several other positions had been created and filled through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. The assistance of staff persons made available by such funding provides important back-up services like child care and client advocacy.

Clerical support has become imperative at the Center for Battered Women in Austin, Texas, as that shelter plays an increasingly important role in consulting with other agencies across the state, as well as participating in a statewide network of information sharing.

VOLUNTEERS

Three staff persons cannot perform all of the functions at the Center. A large, well-trained group of volunteers relieves the direct staff of a significant amount of responsibility. That group is an integral part of the Center for Battered Women and its ability to function. The operation of the Center outside "office" hours—from early evening until seven o'clock in the morning during the week, and around the clock on weekends—is primarily the responsibility of volunteers. A tremendous amount of coordination and training from direct staff, as well as cooperation from a dedicated group of volunteers, is required.

The Volunteer Coordinator organizes recruitment and training of new volunteers. The Coordinator is responsible for scheduling and directs training programs for current volunteers as well. Meetings are held once each month to air grievances, set ongoing goals, plan new projects, and receive further training. Simple first-aid techniques were the topic of one meeting, while legal interventions for battered women were the topic of another gathering.

Because there are only three paid staff persons, the role of the volunteers is important. Volunteers' activities and responsibilities closely parallel those of the permanent staff, particularly on weekends when volunteers are in charge.

Through a Volunteer newsletter distributed monthly, the Coordinator is able to keep in touch with all of the nonpaid staff, to inform them of upcoming events and to spotlight the "volunteer of the month."

The high degree of responsibility given to the volunteers and their continuous training experiences impress upon them their importance as staff members. They are not a haphazard consortium of individuals who appear at different times to "do their own thing" at the Center.

The goal of the Austin shelter is to develop a self-sustaining cadre of well-trained volunteers who develop their own sense of professionalism and responsibility towards the Center. Without this group, the Center itself would function in crisis, with shifts going uncovered and direct service staff having to work around the clock to fill the gaps.

Approximately seventy active volunteers serve the Center. The minimum requirement for staying active is eight hours of service each month. New volunteers participate in ten hours of orientation before assuming responsibilities at the Center. Four training sessions, 2½ hours each, are held. The prospective newcomers look closely at their reasons for wanting to become volunteers at the Center for Battered Women, as well as at their individual perceptions and biases about battered women.

In small groups they learn about the goals and objectives of the Center and its resource and referral base. Here they practice newly acquired counseling skills.

For their first few shifts, each new volunteer is teamed with one of the more "seasoned" volunteers who provides emotional support for the newcomer testing out her confidence and skill. A second level of support for a new volunteer comes from the direct staff, one of whom is always on call and can be contacted immediately with a beeper.

The volunteers' primary contribution is answering the hotline and monitoring activities at the Center during their shift. They are encouraged to expand their involvement to include public speaking, research activities, fund-raising, house maintenance, and advocacy. Some volunteers make themselves available on an on-call basis for emergency transportation of a victim to the shelter, an important and generous contribution. In many ways, the talents of the volunteers are being utilized in such a manner that ultimately the only limitations will be time and imagination.

No one personality type exists among the volunteers. Their ages range from 18 to 70. Approximately 20% of them have been victims of battering. Some seem to have a mission, while others simply have free time on their hands. Occupations among the volunteers vary from meter reader to para-legal, real estate agent, mother-housewife, and nurse. All of the volunteers probably have personal reasons for contributing their time to the Center, but the extent to which they are aware of those reasons probably varies significantly.

The experiences of one "rookie" volunteer on the first evening shift may help to portray the events and implications . . . . .

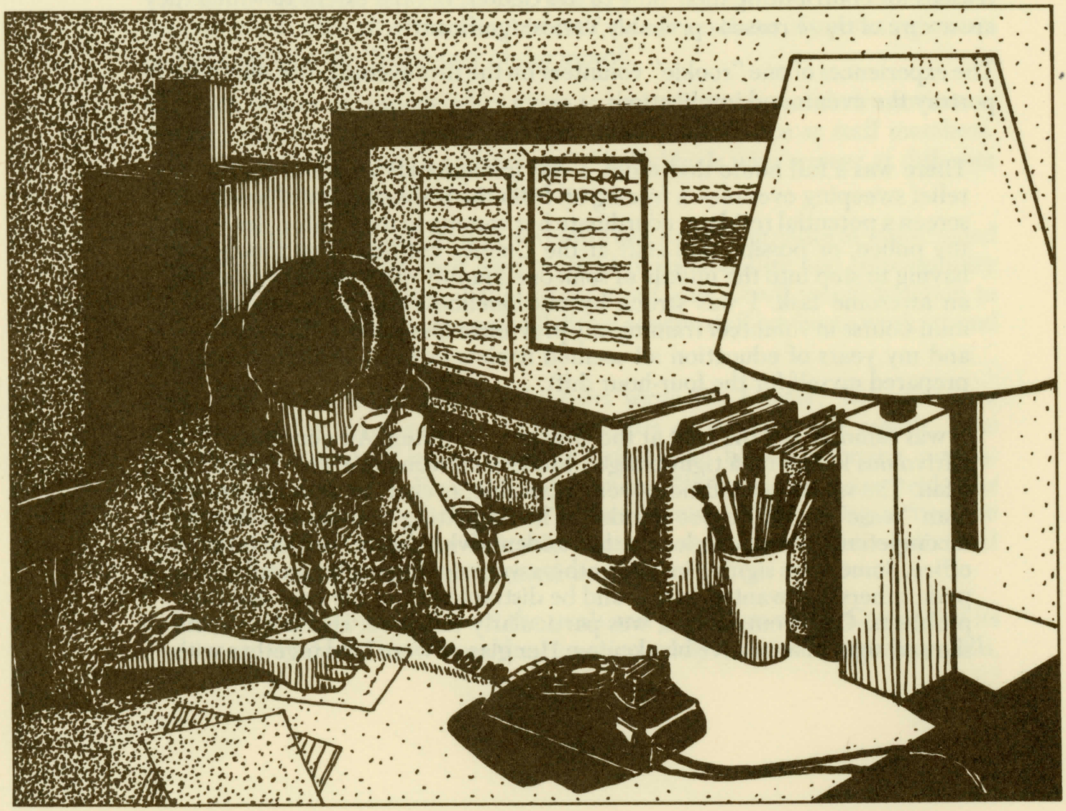
> There was a full house that night. I was immediately aware of a sense of relief sweeping over me—a freeing up from the responsibility of having to screen a potential resident, coordinate her coming to the Center, deal with the police, or possibly the staff at the County hospital. The thought of having to step into the middle of someone's family crisis suddenly seemed an awesome task. I was struck by my loneliness and helplessness. My mini-course in volunteer training, my previous experiences with crisis lines, and my years of education all seemed irrelevant now. Dumbfounded, I prepared myself for the four-hour shift.
>
> It was summer and the heat at the Center was stifling. Air conditioning is a frivolous luxury on a tight budget. Modern convenience was reduced to a fan. The working conditions were miserable; even a fan does little more than "tease" in 100 degree weather. The stagnating heat and my fears of incompetency were soon lost to the residents who slowly trickled into the office. Some were signing in while others were signing out for a walk to the park; others just wanted to talk and be distracted from the heat and their problems. One woman, Lyn, was particularly talkative. Her left eye still showed signs of a massive blackening. Her glasses were held together with

electrician's black tape—her husband hadn't bothered to remove them before kicking her.

This was Lyn's second visit to the Center. Like many of the women, she had returned home after her first stay. Hearing her husband apologize and swear that he couldn't make it without her, promising that everything would be different, she had returned.

The bruises and pain from the beatings usually fade away. Time distorts bitter memories, and fantasies of the American dream of a loving husband and a happy home further distort reality. So, the woman returns, as Lyn did, outwardly hopeful, yet inwardly demoralized, scared and humiliated. How many times has she heard those promises, I wondered to myself as I listened to her story. I know that some of the women sneak out of the shelter to return home, embarrassed to admit they are going to a place everyone knows is not safe. Lyn felt she had let the staff down the first time she returned; she didn't realize she had let herself down first.

Lyn had come to the Center this second time, determined to alter her life. Her husband hadn't changed at all; he was still drinking and had not worked in three years. This last beating had not been the worst, but Lyn was



determined it would be the last. Their four children were not getting proper care while she lived with her husband. The twins were sick, and she couldn't afford any more days off from work. She talked with her case worker and made arrangements for the children to be in foster care while she filed for divorce and resided at the Center. She had been at the Center several weeks when I met her that night. Her husband had called three times in two hours; he tried to leave messages about how much he loved her. He sounded drunk and confused.

Lyn would have talked for hours; her hunger for attention was considerable. However, another resident ventured in with her four children aged six, five, three and eighteen months. They were beautiful children—dark hair and deep brown eyes, smelling of soap and shining-clean. The mother and children spoke little English. The children attempted to teach me some Spanish words, and they laughed heartily at my poor enunciation. I jokingly told them I knew one Spanish word, cerveza. In broken English and through their dramatizations, they responded that their father liked to go to the "cantina," have cerveza, and fight. This was all related in the spirit of the game we were playing, as though the reality of their words escaped them. Their resiliency and naivete showed through—didn't all daddies drink beer and come home fighting?

The "party" ended when the phone rang. Everyone seemed to understand that calls were important, and they ushered themselves out the door, leaving to me whatever potential "crisis" that might be on the other end of the line. I felt abandoned. My initial feelings of incompetency and disbelief at the reality of a phenomenon which I had researched for months swept over me once again.

When I answered the phone, the caller introduced herself as a "friend of a friend" of a battered woman. There was stress in the caller's voice. In a classic way, she did not want to get involved. Who does? It was apparent the caller was closer to the problem than originally hinted, and she soon admitted to being the neighbor of the battered woman. She continued declaring she didn't want to be involved. Yet the victim she described, a Vietnamese woman, spoke little English. If the neighbor didn't get involved, who would? The victim's husband was in the military—they must have met when he was stationed overseas. Not surprisingly, the caller said all the victim wanted was to return to her homeland.

SUMMARY OF CENTER SERVICES

It is difficult to summarize the activities at the Center for Battered Women. Against a dynamic and unpredictable background the staff and residents engage in the most mundane of tasks, cleaning house and washing clothes, as well as the most exciting and challenging human behavior, loving and supporting someone in need.

The Center for Battered Women makes its greatest contribution by providing a shelter for women and their children wanting to escape violence. A woman need bring only herself; all of her basic needs for food and clothing can be taken care of by the Center. Through community referrals and advocacy, the Center goes far beyond just providing a roof; it multiplies its own effectiveness many times over.

During her stay at the Center the woman has access to counseling—individual and group. She also meets other battered women. In this group she can find relief in sharing her long kept secret.

MISTAKES MADE AND LESSONS LEARNED

Many problems confront a grass roots organization like the Center for Battered Women. A cause which is potentially threatening to socially confirmed values, mores, or myths evokes resistance from the general public. A new movement on the cutting edge requires determined, polarized thinking to cut off this inevitable resistance.

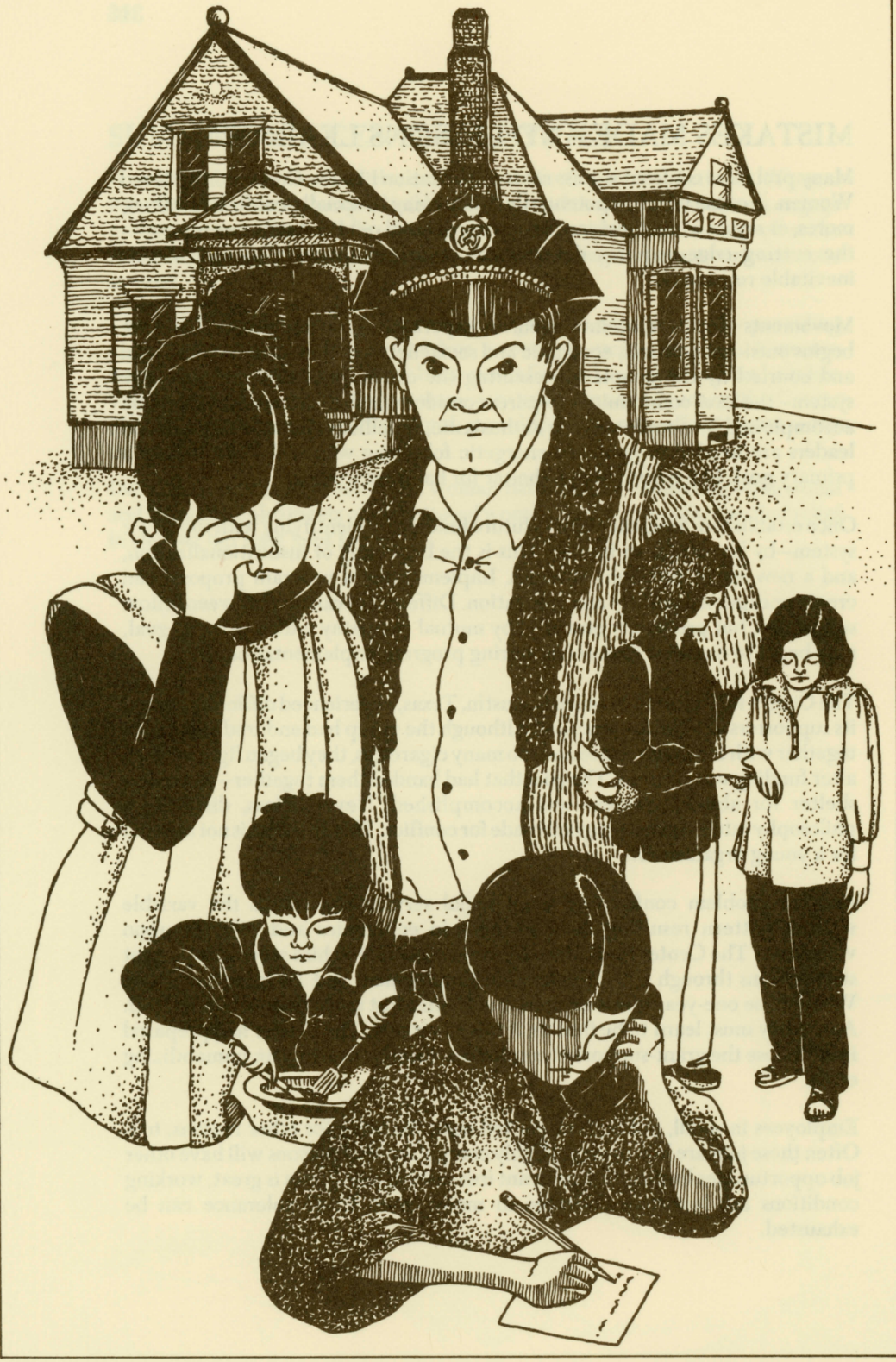
Movements that develop into agencies experience growing pains. The cause begins outside a political, economic and social network that must be infiltrated and courted by the people representing the cause. Breaking into this large system—the local community—requires considerable dedication and it is usually accomplished by people with an enthusiastic, rebellious spirit. Strong-minded leaders are needed to ignite an energetic following who will work toward a primary goal, like establishing a shelter for battered women.

Once established, an agency enjoys future funding by identifying with the larger system—by becoming an insider. This is the beginning of institutionalization, and a new set of problems emerges. Implementing a program proposal can create unexpected anxiety and frustration. Differences existing between fellow supporters, but previously obscured by mutual sympathy with a primary goal, may begin to manifest themselves during program implementation.

The Center for Battered Women in Austin, Texas, experienced difficulty among its supporters at a similar juncture. Although the group had endured late nights together with too much coffee and too many cigarettes, they began fighting soon after funding was secured. The goal that had banded them together—securing a shelter for abused women—was accomplished. Nevertheless, distilling a philosophy into a service program made for conflict. This dilemma is not unusual for a young organization.

Another problem confronting small social service agencies is the variable staffing pattern resulting from changes in economics and reliance upon volunteers. The Center for Battered Women was able to hire several important staff persons through a Comprehensive Employment and Training Act grant. When those one-year terms expired, the Center lost more than half of its staff. An agency must learn to be flexible if it is to survive. The Center had prepared itself to lose the grant-supported employees, thereby averting an immobilizing crisis.

Employees in small, publicly supported agencies leave for other reasons, too. Often these jobs are low paying. Highly competent staff persons will have other job opportunities leading to significant increases in pay. Stress is great; working conditions are less than desirable in many cases. One's tolerance can be exhausted.



A problem facing most organizations is how to operate in the present with future goals clearly in mind. Objectives need to be set for the future, with current program activities directed towards those goals. Laborious analyses and careful evaluation of daily operations are required. Conceptualizing an agency within this larger framework of both present and future forces direction and consistency in program activities. Many agencies remain in one posture or the other. They are naively bound to the future and ignore the present, or they simply repeat daily routines and stagnate in the present.

Another way of mapping program activities is by subscribing to a theory or set of theories that attempt to explain the issue in question. A theory outlines a piece of phenomenon systematically and comprehensively. The explanatory nature of a theory makes it diagnostic and prescriptive. Theory developed in relevant disciplines like psychology, sociology, education or business makes meaningful decision making possible during program development.

Articulating an operational theory or model for an organization is difficult. Serious thinking and expert advice or research are required. Directors easily become immersed in daily problems and forget to ask if their agency is operating in accordance with a previously defined model or theory. Organizations charting new territory have a more difficult time. There are few models to follow.

The board of directors for an agency has final responsibility for quality programming. A solid board of directors is paramount for a fledgling organization. It should be composed of informed people who represent the community and are experienced with the issues relevant to the services delivered. At least one member should be familiar with legal matters and one other competent in financial matters.

A functioning board provides guidance to its agency and helps to gather support for it in the community. Board members act as overseers. They are not burdened with daily operations, and they lend an outsider's perspective and judgment. The board should be concerned about the presence or absence of the theory/theories binding a program's activities.

Choosing the board of directors is one of the most important events occurring in the development of an organization. Close scrutiny of the board members' role and the demands to be made of them should lead to stringent screening of potential candidates. Training and orientation sessions should be available for each new member.

Selecting directors, developing comprehensive programs, setting realistic goals for the future and connecting them to current programming, staffing in variable patterns, and meeting the growing pains of institutionalization—these are

problems a young organization will face. By definition a new organization will flounder for awhile. There will be power struggles and initial uncertainty about what and how to do everything. Eventually these problems must be overcome. If not, the quality of the product (or services rendered) will be jeopardized and the market of supply and demand will decide the fate of the agency.

Keen competition for money makes every organization a target for criticism. Critics of the Center for Battered Women question the validity of a short-term intervention for a long-term problem.

During her brief stay at the shelter, a woman is challenged to consider a variety of options. For the thirty or forty percent of the clients leaving their mates, the short-term intervention might be evaluated as successful. For the women returning to their mates embarrassed and ashamed, success is questionable. These women typically sneak out of the Center in the middle of the night, or they simply fail to return from an appointment. The source of their guilt is themselves.

Other residents leave with new determination to begin family counseling. Supported by the staff, a woman can return home and begin a different communication pattern with her mate. In a loving and trusting way, she can attempt to convince him that they both need help. The Center for Battered Women helps the residents by teaching them to help themselves.

In a larger perspective, the shelter acts as a public reminder of a problem. It makes family violence a public issue, an important first step. Problems that stay hidden do not get addressed. The Center for Battered Women in Austin, Texas, is one community's response to a social issue. Hopefully it can act as a model for shelters elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

There is an inherent paradox in any discussion of family violence—the words themselves seem awkward together. Socially shared norms which characterize the family as a peaceful, loving and harmonious grouping stand in marked contrast to norms which imply the right of family members to strike one another. The family condition legitimizes violence. The husband will insist, "She deserved it," and the woman will agree.

The marriage license is frequently referred to as a *hitting* license in the literature on family violence. An unobtrusive measure of how deeply society believes this was demonstrated by three psychologists from Michigan State University. A series of fights was staged and witnessed publicly by unsuspecting passersby. The researchers found that male witnesses rushed to the aid of the men being assaulted by either men or women, and that men helped women being hit by other women. Not one male bystander interfered when a male actor apparently beat up a women.[3]

According to FBI statistics, wife beating occurs three times as often as rape and is the single "most unreported" crime in the country. That men are beating women is an indication that all is not well for them, either. The presumption of male superiority in our society leaves some men vulnerable. Weak or inadequate men need to fall back on the "ultimate resource" of physical strength to maintain their superior position.

Family violence is a problem for both men and for women. The Center for Battered Women, as a stopgap measure, is a crisis center that provides a partial solution to the problem.

The myths maintaining the violence between men and women are woven deeply into the matrix of society's norms and values. Crisis intervention succeeds to the extent that it is supported by wider reaching interventions—interventions that challenge the myths. Such programs might include day care for mothers wanting to work and flexible time schedules for working mothers. Other examples of preventive mental health in this area might include allowing men to be more nurturant and relieving them of the pressure to achieve constantly.

Crisis intervention is a powerful source of change within an environment committed to preventive mental health. In the case of battered women, such efforts are nothing more than band-aid programs without the support of the larger, supporting context.

---

[3]Letty Cottin Pogrebin, "Do Women Make Men Violent?" *MS.* 49–55 and 80, November 1974.

Design and Art by Rebecca Winger


THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS